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Interview with George Mitchell (6) by Andrea L'Hommedieu

George J. Mitchell

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George Mitchell (6) **GMOH #226**
(*Interviewer: Andrea L'Hommedieu*) June 6, 2011

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the George J. Mitchell Oral History Project at Bowdoin College. The date is June 6, 2011, I'm here in South Portland with Senator George J. Mitchell, Jr., and this is Andrea L'Hommedieu. Senator, today I'd like to start by talking a little bit about Disney and your time on the board there. It was a controversial time in some ways. Can you talk about how you came to be in that role?

GM: In March of 1994, I announced that I would not seek reelection to the Senate later that year and that I would retire from the Senate when my term expired in January of 1995. I subsequently received a large number of invitations to join law firms, universities, companies, and other business enterprises, and I told them all that I wanted to wait until I'd actually left the Senate before I decided what I wanted to do, or at the very least until very late in my term, after all of the business had been completed in 1994.

That summer, I was invited to give a series of speeches in various places, and one of them was at an event in Los Angeles [p/o] in behalf of the University of Southern California. It was basically a recognition and fund-raising event for a large, very fine university. I had been invited by a number of people who I knew in Los Angeles, one of whom was a member of the board and had been very friendly and helpful to me in the past.

So I went out there, and to my surprise part of the program was [produced by] Disney Entertainment. It turned out that another member of the board was also a board member of the Walt Disney Company, and several of the executives of the company were there, and I got to meet them. They then approached me, subsequently, to ask me whether I would consider joining the company when I left the Senate as number two in command [at the Walt Disney Company]. I can't remember the exact title. It may have been president, now that I think of it.

I was flattered of course. The person who had previously served in that position was a man named Frank Wells, who I knew, not well, but I had met several times. He was a truly outstanding man, extremely able, and he had died tragically in a helicopter crash. So they were looking for someone to fill his position, to supplement that of the chief executive officer who at the time was Michael Eisner.

Later that year I had some conversations with Michael and other board members, I traveled to the Los Angeles area to meet with them, but ultimately I declined. I told them that I was really honored and flattered, as I was, but I had made a decision about retiring in part because I was

going to be married that year, in December of 1994, and my wife-to-be, who is now my wife Heather, had lived in New York for some time and she wanted to live there. I really wanted to live in Maine, so I didn't want to go even further away from Maine. As I've said many times, she wanted to live in New York, I wanted to live in Maine, and we compromised and we live in New York. (*laughter*) That's the way life is. But also, I didn't feel comfortable that I really knew enough about the business of the Walt Disney Company to do an effective job. But the main reason was a desire to stay on the East Coast, closer to my home and my family in Maine.

After I declined the invitation to join the company on a full time basis, Michael Eisner, who I got to know real well and who was and is a good friend, called me and asked: "We understand that you're not prepared to accept a full time position; would you consider joining our board of directors?" (which is, of course, a part-time position). I had received invitations to join several boards, many of which I did join, most of which I declined because I couldn't do as many as I was asked to do. But I did like the people at Disney, I did like the company, so I joined the board in about the middle or latter part of 1995 [ ]. I remained on the board for a total of about eleven years, until 2006, when I retired because of age. The service on the board was interesting, the people were interesting, the business was interesting. It really was a very enjoyable time, not the least of which is I got to take my kids to Disney World on several occasions, which they loved and I loved and my wife loved.

In the early 2000s the company, after a very long period of substantial growth in income and profits and share price, hit a little bit of a rough patch, and there was some turbulence. Two of the board members, Roy Disney, who was a nephew of Walt Disney, and [ ] Stanley Gold, who was Roy's lawyer [p/o], entered a period of disagreement with Michael Eisner over the way the company was being managed. It got to be a little difficult on the board as some controversy swirled.

Michael at the time served both as the chief executive officer and as the chairman of the board, and a number of American companies were, and many still are, run the same way. But there began to be some external criticism by corporate governance groups urging that the two positions be separated, not just on the Walt Disney Company but on others. Some companies responded to that, some did not. Disney was one company that did respond to it, with Michael's full cooperation and support. Subsequently, I believe it was in 2003 or thereabouts, I was asked by the board to become the chairman of the board of directors.

After some hesitation, because I was concerned about the time involved—when I left the Senate the full time position I accepted was that of a lawyer with the law firm of Verner Liipfert in Washington, which subsequently went through a series of mergers that led it to become part of a very large international law firm, now DLA Piper, and I had a number of other commitments, other boards and other activities, so I wanted to be sure I could devote sufficient time to it—I did accept the position and I served as the chairman of the board for about three years.

During that time, Michael left the position of chief executive officer and went on to other business and entrepreneurial activities after a really highly successful career with the company.

I chaired the process by which a successor was appointed, a man named Bob Iger, who remains to this day as the chief executive officer of the company. It wasn't easy. There was a lot of back-and-forth about it, but I think it was managed quite well and the company really has done well. One truly outstanding leader, Michael Eisner, who had served twenty-one years, so he'd been there for a long time, by far the most effectively, was succeeded by Bob Iger, who was the number two in the company at the time, had been with the company for many years and has also served very effectively. It was a good and interesting experience. As I said, I liked the company. I was flattered originally to be asked to join the company full time, and then to be asked to serve on the board.

AL: There must have been a lot of different personalities on the board. You have a real way of merging different personalities and being effective. Do you have any anecdotes or impressions left with you about how you did that?

GM: The last time you interviewed me you asked me about Major League Baseball, and I told you the story about how my relationship developed and how there had been some exaggeration of the possibility that I might be offered and accept the position of commissioner of baseball. As I pointed out to you, I was never offered the position so I never had anything to accept or reject. But in the course of that time I was asked about it a couple times, and as I pointed out to you in our last interview, a couple of owners called me and urged me to consider it should it come up, which it never did.

In one of those discussions one of the owners said to me, "Well, you know Senator, there are twenty-eight"—or thirty, I don't know whether baseball had twenty-eight teams or thirty then, there are thirty now—"big egos that you'd have to deal with." I said, "Well listen, I've been majority leader of the Senate for six years. For me, twenty-eight would be a 72 percent reduction." (*laughter*) Because everybody in the Senate has got a big ego, how do you think they got there: ambitious, aggressive, able, wanting to do something in and with their lives.

It is the same on most corporate boards because, at least [at] these large companies, most of the members of the boards are extremely able, distinguished people in their own rights. Almost all of them have had truly outstanding careers. Just to think back on the Disney board which you're mentioning now, one of the members of the board was Sidney Poitier, who had been a very successful, brilliant actor over a very long period of time and certainly knew the movie business very well. Another was Roy Disney himself, nephew of the legendary Walt Disney, who grew up in the business and knew it very well.

Another was Bob Stern, Robert A.M. Stern, who's one of the most famous architects certainly today and in modern American history, and is now the dean of the School of Architecture at Yale University, among his other many accomplishments. A very able woman, Monica Lozano, who's the publisher of the largest Spanish language newspaper in the United States, based in Los Angeles; Leo Donovan, who is a Jesuit priest who had served for twelve years as the president of Georgetown University in Washington; the man who succeeded me as chairman, who was on the board, John Pepper, who had previously served as the chief executive officer and chairman of the

Proctor & Gamble Company, one of the largest and most successful companies in the world; Steve Jobs, who is the chief executive officer of Apple, one of the most well-known and successful business executives in all of American history. He came on toward the end of my tenure, because Disney acquired Pixar, which Steve was one of the founders of. So these are all—and all of the other members of the board, I'm not mentioning everybody so someone's going to be offended here—but they're all very, very distinguished people. So yes, you have to deal with egos, and that's part of it, that's part of the process that requires capable and sensible leadership.

But when you get down to it all, it is really just pretty much common sense, being able to get along with people. Most of all, I think, being candid. Not insultingly candid, not so much telling people off, but telling them the truth about the way things are going. One of the problems of power in any context—government is the best known, but large businesses and any aspect of life—one of the problems of power is that people tend not to tell the truly powerful what they think the leader may not want to hear. It's often hard for strong and effective, capable, ambitious and aggressive leaders to get good information because, a lot of times, people think they might offend them if they tell them the truth or what the facts are.

I found that in government, in business, and in really any area of life, you can most effectively serve someone if you are candid about your own advice, counsel, recommendations. Again, not in a manner that's abrasive or overbearing, but firm and truthful in a calm and reasonable and thoughtful way, always explaining why. If you don't have a good reason for a recommendation, then you should probably rethink the recommendation. And if you have a good reason, you should make it clear so people understand that there is a basis for what you're doing. They may disagree with the basis and therefore disagree with your recommendation, but at least they know that you've thought it through.

I have to say that in my time in the Senate, where I think I really learned that best of all, I spent a lot of time, as you know, in Maine. For most of my Senate career I came to Maine every weekend. I made a public promise that I would have a private meeting with any citizen of Maine who wanted to meet with me. That wasn't so hard to do when I made the promise because I was way down in the polls and it didn't look like I had much chance to win, so not [ ] many people cared about talking to me. But after I got to be majority leader eight or so years later the list got very long. But I kept the promise. I used to come here and sit in my office in Portland or in Bangor or in Presque Isle on weekends and meet people one at a time for as long as anybody wanted to see me.

I found that many people came in who disagreed with me. That's the reason they came, to express their disagreement. But for the most part, if I had a rational basis for my decision, if I could explain it in a way that was reasonable, even if people didn't agree—they continued to disagree—they would say, "Well okay, I don't agree with you but I understand the reason for your doing so." I think that's true whether you're dealing with constituents, with corporate leaders, with presidents, or with anybody else.

AL: I want to switch gears and talk about the Red Cross 9/11 commission, the [Liberty] Fund, and how did you become contacted about that and then get involved?

GM: After 9/11, many organizations, including the American Red Cross, received large sums of money intended for the victims and the survivors of those who were killed in that horrific attack. There began to be some criticism of the Red Cross for what was a perceived disparity between the purposes set forth in the fund-raising effort and the way the funds were being used.

The man who was then the chairman of the board of Red Cross—he was a volunteer, not a paid employee—was friendly with one of the senior partners in the law firm with which I served and so he, representing the board, contacted the senior partner and asked whether they thought I would be willing to serve as the independent overseer of this fund to devise the most fair way, the most effective way, of distributing these funds. My partner, Berl Bernhard, came to me and asked if I would do that and I said, "Well yes, of course. I think every American has an obligation to do what they can in the wake of this terrific tragedy, to do what we can." So I accepted and I served for about one year as the independent overseer of what grew to be a very large fund. I think it was over a billion, one hundred million dollars by the time this all was completed. For me, it was an incredible experience.

First off, I had been in New York on the day of the 9/11 attack. I left home that morning to go to the airport; I was scheduled to fly to Washington to give a speech at a conference in Washington that day. By the time I got to LaGuardia Airport, the airport had been shut down. I didn't realize it until I got out of the car that brought me there, went into the terminal, and I could see of course huge crowds of people milling around, and I was told that the airport had been shut down and the reason why. That was after the first plane had struck.

So I went outside, figuring that there weren't going to be any more flights for quite a while and I, after some effort, hailed down a limousine—a car service—who had obviously come to the airport and dropped someone off and now was empty, heading back into town. So I asked if he would take me back into the city and he said yes, and so we started back into the city and by an incredible coincidence, just as we got onto the Triboro Bridge heading back into Manhattan, the bridge was closed. So we were stopped sort of at the crest of the bridge, and of course the driver had the radio on and we were listening, and by then the second plane had struck. By the most incredible circumstances, you could see from where we were sitting on top of the bridge—it must have been seven or eight or ten miles to where the towers were—but you could actually see the smoke rising from the towers and the top of the towers. We were listening to it on the radio, and the driver and I observed the tower when it collapsed, listening to an eyewitness account from someone in an adjacent building on the radio at the same time.

Ultimately the bridge was reopened and we were able to continue on, but we couldn't get into Manhattan. There are, I learned on that day, six or seven bridges into Manhattan, and going from east to west the driver drove around to each of them trying to find one that was open. When we got to the last one, which is called the 230th Street Bridge—it's on the far northwestern corner of Manhattan—that was closed, too. The driver said to me, "I'm

Palestinian, and I'm very frightened." He didn't know who I was. He said "I'm very sorry, but I'm not going to try to take you any farther. I have a wife and children in New Jersey. I want to go home to my wife and children so I'm going to leave you here." So he left me at the 230th Street Bridge in Manhattan.

Now the bad news is, I was a long way out of Manhattan. The good news is, I was on Broadway, which is the street that my apartment was on. The difficulty was that my apartment was on 66th Street and I was at 230th Street, about [eight] miles away. The bridge was closed. There were two police officers standing there, and there must have been a crowd of two or three hundred people trying to walk across the bridge back into Manhattan. I remember it was a very warm day, very humid. But the police officers said they'd been instructed that no person should be permitted to enter Manhattan by car or by foot. So I, with the other few hundred people, just milled around for a while.

Then—it wasn't too long, it was less than an hour—suddenly the police officers just left, they just walked off, and the bridge was there, open, so we all just walked across the bridge. I walked along with this large crowd into Manhattan, continued straight down Broadway, because I knew it would take me a long time to get home because it was several miles, although I was on the right street. But after some time, another limousine came by and I hailed him down and got him to take me—it was not a long distance, a relatively short distance—and I continued to walk, and then another car I got to pick me up, take me another ways.

When this fellow let me off it was right near a subway station, and as I got out of the limousine there was a police officer standing on the curb. He recognized me and called me by name. After he asked me where I was going and I told him the circumstances, he said, "Well, this subway line is going to reopen in just a few minutes. You go on in and you can take a subway in." It wasn't the line that went right near my apartment but close enough. So I went downstairs and waited for the subway to come and went home. It took me about five-and-a-half hours to get home that day.

The day was indelibly imprinted in mind, of course as it was in everyone else's all around the world, particularly those who were in Manhattan at that time and in the subsequent days. Cell phone service couldn't work, I couldn't reach my wife, didn't know where my children were, so it was a sensitive period. I had it very much in mind when I accepted this position in the following January.

As I said, I served for a year. I spent about six weeks meeting with hundreds and hundreds of the families of those who had been killed and some of the survivors, and it was truly an incredible experience. One of the lessons that was very strongly reinforced was the difficulty of applying the concept of fairness in a situation in which you had thousands of people, each of whom was in a unique circumstance, each of whom had some concept of fairness that applied to them but placed them at odds with others.

I can best sum it up by a discussion I had with about fifteen or twenty women whose husbands

were killed in the tragedy. It lasted for several hours. It was one of dozens and dozens of such meetings I had, trying to get a sufficient factual basis, an emotional understanding, and some conceptual rationale for how I would distribute these vast sums of money among these other people. Because I knew, the Red Cross had made clear, they would take my recommendation. Basically, I was going to decide where this money was going to go.

One woman said, "I have four children, and I think the compensation should be based upon the number of surviving children." Which is a very logical argument: if a widow had one child and another had four, you would think that you would want to weight the compensation toward the widow with four. But another woman said, "Well I have two children but one of them is retarded, and don't you think that I and my child, who has serious problems of disability, need the help, now that their father and my husband is gone, at least as much as someone who has four healthy children?" Not an illogical argument.

Then another woman said, "Well, my husband was a waiter. Yours,"—she pointed to the woman with four children—"was a banker. Don't you think that the amount of money or means that we already have or don't have ought to be a factor in deciding who gets how much?" Several more women spoke up in this way, and it turned out that of the twenty or so women in the room, no two of them were in identical circumstances. Each one of them had a very powerful emotional case, and most of them were not only emotional but logical and persuasive from their standpoint.

As a result, I knew that I had an extremely difficult task. So I put it all together, after having, as I said, met—I'm sure in the aggregate the number of people I met was in the thousands, and the number of meetings I had was in the dozens (in groups, some as large as a couple of hundred, some as small as three or four, most of them of the size I discussed, twenty, twenty-five people or so, thirty)—and with the aid of a couple of lawyers from my firm who were helping me, I put together what I thought made the most sense. I then tried that out on representative groups, and also some agencies that had experience in the Oklahoma City tragedy and who were in this field for a long time, and I got a lot of feedback. There were clearly some better ways to do things than I had thought up, so I benefitted from the feedback. Some recommendations I didn't accept. But it was a lengthy process.

But because I'd gone through both of those steps, by the time we finished, the recommendations, when I announced them, were pretty nearly unanimously accepted. There was very little dissent or disagreement. The Red Cross adopted them. Most of the agencies that would be involved in administering programs that were funded were public in their support, and the vast majority of spokespersons for various victims' groups, including some I'd met, some I hadn't met, publicly endorsed the plan.

So it was both very much a learning experience for me, especially in the principle of: fairness is an easy thing to say, but human beings are complicated, human lives are complicated, human societies are complicated, and it isn't always simple to decide what is the 'fair' way to do something. It takes a lot of time and effort, study and analysis of the problem, and most of all of

course hearing from those who are directly involved. They were the ones best in the position to know what to do, what not to do. Putting it all together, we came up with what I think was a successful plan.

Most of the following year, my time was taken up in that task. It was one that I'll always remember because I think in the end I learned more about it certainly than I knew, and I benefitted from it by having gone through that experience.

AL: So, you were very separate from what was happening within the Red Cross as well.

GM: That's right.

AL: You really weren't involved or have insight into the changes that were taking place?

GM: No, I did not. I had no role whatsoever in that—really preferred not to have a role in that. The operation of management of the Red Cross was conducted completely independent of my participation. There was some controversy, but that was nothing that I was involved in. I was asked to do a very specific task, and I concentrated entirely on that task and made no effort to intervene or use my position to get involved in matters outside the mandate that I'd received.

AL: I want to just note, the word 'overseer' in your title is an interesting one, where I don't see that word used. Did you have input into that title, do you recall? Was it meant to -?

GM: I can't recall who suggested the title. It may have been Berl Bernhard, the lawyer that I had mentioned who was and remains a very close and good friend of mine. One of the really best and most able, generous, and public spirited persons I've ever met. But I don't know whether he dreamed it up or whether that came from the people at the Red Cross, or how it came up. Although 'overseer' sounds like you oversee the actual expenditure of funds, the principal task was to devise a fair mechanism for divvying up where it would go. I left after a year, before all of the funds were distributed. I think I'm right that a couple of the people who worked with me on it at our firm continued to stay on afterward with respect to the distribution of the funds.

AL: And I'd like to go now to the subject of Sharm el-Sheikh. As you, since our last interview, announced and stepped down from your position as special envoy in the Middle East, Sharm el-Sheikh was something that in some ways, correct me if I'm wrong, was sort of a foundation for the work that you did under President Obama. Can you talk about that experience and what was the focus of that, and how it played into a foundation for the work you did recently?

GM: In late September of 2000, violence erupted in Jerusalem between Israelis and Palestinians that escalated swiftly. I think more than a hundred people were killed in less than a week, and it ultimately became what was known as the Second Intifada, or the second uprising of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation, which resulted in a great deal of damage, both death of humans and destruction of property.

In October of that year, less than a month after the eruption of violence, the leaders of the region (including the prime minister of Israel, [Ehud Barak]; the then-president of Egypt, Mubarak; the then-chairman of the Palestinian Authority, Arafat), President Clinton, the secretary general of the United Nations, and many European and other national leaders met in a hastily called summit meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, which is the name of a resort town in the south of Egypt [Sinai].

They were anxious to come up with some mechanism for ending the violence, trying to get the parties back to negotiations. One of several things they agreed upon was to create a commission to look into what had happened and to report back to the leaders on what steps could be taken to accomplish those objectives—to end the violence, get a resumption of negotiation. It was very sensitive, because they didn't want an inquiry which would attempt to assign blame. So the mandate, inherently, was at least to some degree contradictory: that we want you find out what happened and report on it, but don't blame anybody for what went on. But those were the constraints.

I received a telephone call from Sandy Berger, who was then the National Security advisor to President Clinton, who described this to me and said that President Clinton, Prime Minister Barak, and Chairman Arafat had decided that they would like me to serve as chairman of that commission, which would be international in nature, with other members. I agreed to do so. There were four other members, another former United States senator, Warren Rudman of New Hampshire, a Republican, a very close friend of mine—we were close before that, we became even more close through that experience. He is really an amazing guy, a very dear friend. He incidentally has a summer home up in the Harpswell area and so I see him occasionally in Maine [ ].

The other three members were the then-foreign minister of Norway, who had previously been prime minister and is now I think the chairman of their Norwegian parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, his name is Thorbjørn Jagland; a man named Javier Solana, who is from Spain, he was at the time and served for several years as the—they have a different title, but it's essentially the secretary of state for foreign affairs for the European Union; and then finally a former president of Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, who had been president of Turkey previously and was by that time retired.

We spent probably a total of seven or eight months at the task. It was extremely difficult. By a complete coincidence, I think—I don't know if this is coincidence or not, but the way it happened—it was announced on the day of the election of 2000, the Bush-Gore election was held, and on Election Day this commission was announced.

Just a brief digression of how history takes funny twists and turns. A few weeks later, when that election got tangled up in the Florida results, first Bill Daley, who was then involved in Vice President Gore's effort and who is now the chief of staff to President Obama, and then Al Gore himself, called me and asked me to come to Florida to head up the effort of the legal team that was trying to sort out the results down there (I guess [that's] the most benign way that I can

describe it now). But I said to both of them, "I just accepted this assignment from President Clinton to go to the Middle East." In fact, I was leaving in a short time. We thought we were going to make an early trip over there; it ended up we didn't go right away. So I said, "I just can't do it, I've got this other assignment. I would have to resign from this Middle East commission." So I ended up not doing that and ended up on this commission.

It was a very tough task. As I said, arguably the mandate was tough to follow precisely. In fact we got some criticism later that we didn't more specifically assign blame. Most of the people that criticized it hadn't read the mandate letter (although it was public) that we were given that told us what we should do and what we shouldn't do.

But the report itself was quite well received, widely so. There was an interesting story—of course eventually Bush became the president and he was, as all presidents are, have been in recent years, sworn in on January 20th. We had been appointed on Election Day in November, we'd gotten started in December, we'd had an organizational meeting in New York, we met with both sides, Israelis and Palestinians. But I thought that since Clinton had been president when I was appointed and Bush now was president that Bush really, in fairness, ought to have a chance to either withdraw or appoint his own person.

So on January 21, the day after President Bush took office, I went to see Colin Powell, who was the secretary of state, and I said just that to him. I said, "Look, we were appointed when President Clinton was in office, we've gotten started but just barely organized, so if you and the president would like, I will withdraw and permit you to appoint someone of your choosing, or"—and I had discussed this with the other commissioners before, I told them, I don't think we should continue if the parties don't want us to continue—"or we are prepared to disband as a commission, if you don't want it to go forward."

Powell, who was and again also remains a good friend, someone who I greatly admire, said, "No-no, we want you to stay. We want the commission to continue, and we want you personally to stay in the position." I then went to see both Arafat, who continued as the Palestinian Authority chairman, and Ariel Sharon, who was just elected to be prime minister of Israel. Ehud Barak had been the prime minister when this happened, and shortly thereafter an election was held and he was defeated by Sharon. So I felt also that Sharon should have the opportunity to withdraw, particularly since Sharon had very publicly criticized Barak for agreeing to the creation of the commission. He called it—I want to be sure of my words—I think he called it an "historic mistake," or something like that. That it will be a bad thing for Israel.

So I went to see Sharon and I said, "If you want this to end, it will end. It cannot work if we don't have the full cooperation of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority." I told him that I'd already seen Colin Powel. "The Bush administration wants me to continue, wants the commission to continue, but you have the opportunity to withdraw." "No," he said, "we'll go ahead." Even though, as I said, he had called it an historic mistake, I think he didn't want the responsibility for this commission not proceeding. Neither did Arafat. I think they both had some reservations about it. In any event, for the next several months we and the staff we had

obtained went there, traveled very widely throughout the area, throughout the West Bank, throughout Gaza, throughout Israel.

AL: Unhindered?

GM: Well, we were very heavily protected. We had lots of security. It was still hard to get around because it's not an easy place to travel in, but we were not prevented from going anywhere. We had full access everywhere. I made several trips to Gaza, both the city and other cities within Gaza—the name also of the area—and we had a lot of contacts with both entities. We received a great deal of information. Both sides had very large and active legal staffs, a lot of lawyers involved. We got all kinds of briefs, videos, arguments, presentations. We made the report and it was pretty well received. It was accepted by both sides, with some reservations, but no action was ever taken to implement it. Unfortunately, like so many other commissions or studies, it essentially went unfulfilled because there was no mechanism to implement the commission's recommendations.

AL: And so in what ways did it provide you with knowledge as you took on the role of special envoy, or did it?

GM: Obviously, it helped me to understand the conflict, to get to know many of the leaders. I had several meetings with the leaders on both sides, and others in the region, other leaders among Arab nations. They don't have the same turnover in leadership that we do in democratic societies. Israel of course does, it's a democratic society. And to learn more about the roots of the conflict and to see firsthand the very high level of mistrust and hostility, hatred even, that exists between the two sides and which makes resolution [of the] conflict very, very difficult. So it was learning process for me and my colleagues.

Now, interestingly, although the five of us are very different, we had an excellent working relationship. There were no substantial disagreements, everybody had their say in the writing of the report, everybody had some input, and I think the five of us were fully satisfied. At various times in the two or three years after we submitted the report I was contacted, [ ] by other members of the commission and [ ] by other governments, who wanted to urge that the commission be reactivated and become an implementing mechanism as well as a recommending mechanism. But that never occurred, for reasons with which I am not familiar. I believe there was resistance to doing so within the administration here, and so it never really went anywhere simply because there was, as I said, no mechanism to implement the recommendations that we'd made.

AL: And I guess the final subject that I'd like to approach today before we end is some recollections of your foreign travel over the years, during Senate years and even outside of those years, especially a trip to Germany which followed, many years later, your military service.

GM: As I described in one of my early interviews, I served in Berlin, Germany, in the U.S. Army Counter-intelligence Service right after college, for two years. I was very young and very

naive. In fact, as I told you in that interview, I had never been on an airplane until I flew on a military transport plane from the United States to Germany, and I had never been on a sleeper train until on that same trip, the plane landed in Frankfurt and I got on a sleeper train that took me from Frankfurt to Berlin for my assignment.

I also described how much I enjoyed my time in the army. I feel that I've been very lucky to be associated with so many great organizations, not least of which is the United States Army. I really honestly felt it was a tremendous privilege to serve, and I feel like I grew up there. I was twenty years old when I graduated from Bowdoin. As I've now said a couple of times, I'd never been on an airplane or a train, I had traveled very little, was still somewhat insecure and uncertain.

I feel as though I grew up quite a bit in the army, both in my training at the Intelligence school, and then in my year-and-a-half of service in Berlin. So much so that I wanted to stay in and serve longer, but I'd been admitted to law school and I couldn't get an extension of my law school admission. So I was forced into a very tough choice, which I finally resolved in favor of leaving the army and going into law school. I would have liked to have stayed in the army for a couple more years, and if I'd been assured of law school acceptance I would have done so.

The job I had in Berlin was very interesting, as I've also previously described. When I returned to Berlin many years later as the Senate majority leader, I saw things with a different perspective. I was obviously older and more mature. I had by then been on airplanes an awful lot, so it wasn't a big event for me to fly there. But I went to some of the places where I'd worked many decades before, and it was quite an experience.

For example, the agency with which I served owned, or maintained, a series of what are called 'safe houses' around Berlin, just homes in a residential area, on a regular street, but that were used for intelligence purposes to house people fleeing from Communism to the West, who we had a particular interest in, also housed people who we were trying to persuade to go back to Communist East Germany, or even the Soviet Union, to serve as spies for us. One of the houses was on a street I had been to many times. I had a small team that worked for me. I was only by then twenty-one, but I had a group of mature and experienced American enlisted men who spoke German and a group of German citizens who had been hired by the United States Army to work in our behalf. So I from time to time went to this home, and it was sort of like a second office.

I thought it would be interesting to go back to the house, and I went up and knocked on the door. An elderly gentleman answered, and fortunately he could understand English, and I just explained to him that I had many years before worked in what was then West Berlin—it's now of course reunited to a single city—and the circumstances were such that before he and his family lived there that I had visited this home often and I just wanted to come back. He was very nice and we chatted for a few minutes. We didn't really do anything. I didn't explain to him what it was I had done. We chatted for a little bit about the neighborhood and life in general, and for me it was kind of a nice remembrance, and it brought back a flood of memories about when I'd worked there and made some very difficult decisions there on what to do with people.

I then learned, probably for the first time, the awesome responsibility when you control someone else's life. Many of these people were vulnerable, and I had the authority to cause their arrest, to cause them to be sent back, to cause them to be held, and it weighed heavily on me, trying to make what I thought was a right and fair decision, especially [my being] a young kid who didn't really have a lot of experience. I thought about it many years later, when I became a federal judge and I had an even greater degree of authority over people's lives. It did on both occasions make me think hard about what's the right thing, what's the fair thing, how do you balance the differing responsibilities and objectives of what you're doing, and how important it is to think things through carefully when you are going to have a profound, maybe lasting effect on someone else's life. It's tough enough to control your own, but to be responsible for others' -

I also had an interesting experience which I thought was a great example of the entrepreneurship that comes with democracy and capitalism. Of course the wall in Berlin was put up in 1961 to keep people from East Germany from going over to the West. It was without a doubt a spectacular admission of the failure of the Communist system, that they had to build a wall to keep their people in, and it seemed to be inevitable that it would not stand. And of course it did not. No one knew exactly how or when it would come down, but I always felt it was inevitable, that Communism would corrode from the inside out, that it was so contrary to human nature and human aspirations. I [later] wrote a book about that called *Not for America Alone*, which describes the long, probably a century or longer, struggle between democracy and Communism in which Communism ultimately collapsed and failed.

I felt certain when it went up that it would go down, but I didn't know how or when, and of course it finally did. On one of my later visits to Berlin, I think I was at the time the Senate majority leader, I headed a delegation that went there after the collapse of the Communist regime and the opening of the Wall. As an incredible example of entrepreneurship, when we went to the Wall there were a bunch of young boys, teenage boys around, and they were offering for rent a hammer and a chisel that you could rent for fifty pfennig, fifty cents, for a few minutes to take and chisel a piece of the broken wall on your own.

Of course all of us did so. I gave them my fifty pfennig and took the hammer and chisel and knocked out a couple of pieces of rock from the Wall. Which I dutifully kept on my dresser at my home in Washington for about five years, until I retired from the Senate, and then I had to go through the process of winnowing things out and among the casualties were the rocks that I didn't take with me, I didn't pack in a bag or anything. But I thought it was a great example of how entrepreneurs are everywhere. These young German boys made a lot of money, because there was a lot of business at the time. In fact, I remember having to wait in line to get my hammer and chisel, get my two minutes of time knocking down the Berlin Wall.

I also got to see part of Berlin that I had been prohibited from seeing before, which was East Berlin. In the Army Intelligence Service we were prohibited from traveling to or through East Berlin or East Germany. So when we went from West Berlin to West Germany, we either had to take the military train, which I had come to Berlin on many years before, or fly. We couldn't

drive through East Germany when I served in the army in West Berlin. So later, when I was there as a senator, the ability to travel into what had been East Berlin, which is historically a very important part of the city of Berlin, just on the eastern side of the Brandenburg Gate (a famous memorial there), that was extremely interesting. You got a sense of what it was like, although not current with the events. That is, I didn't go to East Berlin when it was controlled by the Communists, I went later, after the Wall had come down.

I also, having lived in Berlin for two years, and then I spent five years in Belfast in Northern Ireland, and then I went to the Middle East, have been for long periods of time, including living for long periods of time, in three major cities that are part of major conflicts where a wall was built to separate two warring communities. I formed a belief that walls do provide temporary respites. That is, if the immediate objective is to separate, to reduce contact, to limit travel between the two, they do work for that purpose. But they don't contribute to the ultimate solution, because they don't address the root causes of the conflict itself.

The wall in Berlin is now gone; the wall in Belfast—well, much of it is still standing—I think it no longer has relevance, and I hope it will one day in all of its vestiges come down; and I think the same is going to be true of the Middle East. There's no doubt that the wall erected by the Israelis to reduce access to Palestinians and other Arabs has worked in the short term objective of reducing the number of suicide bombings by reducing the ability of suicide bombers to enter Israel, but it doesn't solve the ultimate problem. Indeed, the Israeli government that built the wall made clear it understood that it was a temporary measure. [ ] The real problem now is to find a way to get at the root causes so that the wall can come down, because ultimately now Israel's security is not so much threatened by suicide bombers as it is by rockets. The technology that is advancing in the use of rockets is a serious military threat to Israel's existence. Of course the wall will serve no useful purpose in preventing that.

So I have to say, I found all of my foreign travel interesting. I've been to many, many, many countries in the world, have seen similarities and differences, have worked with people in governments of all kinds, and I think the most impressive, or to me the most meaningful observation I could make is that despite the many differences between peoples and among societies—color, race, religion, history, culture, how they live—there is a high degree of uniformity among the aspirations of people despite their differences.

I've never been anywhere where people didn't think a very important part of their life is to get their children off to a good start in life—[ ] parents want [ ] their children to be healthy and happy and get a good education, and to have a decent chance in life, better than what they've had. That's under stress in some societies that suffer from high rates of poverty and high birth rates, and in which there are still cultural prejudices against, for example, female children or things of that type. But overall, people seem to want pretty much the same thing: a chance for personal dignity that comes with freedom and the right of self-determination; for opportunity, which doesn't exist for all of the members of any society, including our own (although I think we come the closest to anybody in all of human history).

I believe that one of the great reasons for America's success is that this is the first genuine meritocracy, a place where people can go as high and as far as talent, willingness to work, willingness to take risks will enable them. But there are still people in our country who suffer from at least unequal opportunity, not the full chance that others may have, and we have to do all we can to expand opportunity. I think in many societies it's very limited for members of society.

I think the foreign travel that I've been through has been for the most part very interesting, very informative, and very helpful both in making judgments, and more important in making the right judgments about the various issues and problems that I've confronted and had to either make or contribute to decisions on.

AL: Great; thank you so much.

End of Interview